

Prof. Krystyna Chojnicka

specializes in the history of Russian political and legal thought in the period from the 15th to the 19th century as well as Catholic social teaching. She has authored such books as *Historia doktryn politycznych i prawnych: Podręcznik akademicki* [The History of Political and Legal Doctrines: An Academic Textbook] (together with Henryk Olszewski) and *Cerkiew i car: Prawosławie rosyjskie w reformach Piotra Wielkiego* [The Orthodox Church and the Tsar: The Russian Orthodox Church in Peter the Great's Reforms].

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IT ALL STARTED WITH “DEMONS”

Professor Krystyna Chojnicka from the Department of History of Political and Legal Doctrines, Jagiellonian University, talks about respect for female lawyers, the true role of a Byzantine princess, and how a theatrical performance sparked her interest in Russian legal doctrine.

ACADEMIA: You have been elected a member of the Polish Academy of Sciences (PAS). What does this appointment mean for you?

PROF. KRYSZYNA CHOJNICKA: It gives me great satisfaction. That's because I was not appointed, but rather elected by the most prominent members of the scientific community, among whom I have worked for over 40 years. In other words, I was chosen to be a member of the Academy by people who had full knowledge about me and my research work. Their choice brought me great satisfaction, which was not marred by any doubts over whether it might have been a coincidence or a lucky turn of events.

which is possibly even worse. But that's obvious. Another reason behind this situation lies in the attitudes of women, who don't really believe in themselves. They don't believe that they can achieve success or that a career in science doesn't need to mean giving up traditional female activities – that's because it doesn't! For years, pursuing a career, including in science, was the domain of men. The women who have the courage to follow that path often believe, quite wrongly, that they have to abide by men's rules. Some women don't like to do so and other don't know how, and that's why there are so few of them. As for female professors in Saudi Arabia and Sudan, I suspect that most of them graduated from British and American universities, whereas most of the female professors in Poland are graduates of Polish universities, so these two situations can't actually be compared. However, that's merely a suspicion, I have no data on this issue.

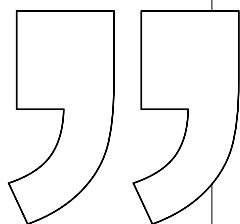
You embarked on your career in science back in the 1970s. Can you see any differences between the attitudes to women in science in Poland back then vs. now?

Back then, there were far fewer women, but the ones that rose to prominence in science were very similar to us today. Maybe somewhat more formal in their demeanor, but the times were simply different. Male professors were also more formal, and maybe that was a good thing, but I find it hard to recreate their way of thinking, because I was a young assistant at that time. I could only see that male professors showed a great deal of respect and friendliness towards their female colleagues, professors. Who knows, maybe there were so few of them that they didn't treat them as rivals?

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Women account for slightly over 7% of all PAS members, which is unfortunately a smaller proportion than in similar institutions in Saudi Arabia and Sudan. What, in your opinion, are the reasons behind such a small share of women in this prestigious body of scholars in Poland?

One reason lies in the attitudes adopted by men, which are not so much unfavorable as politely patronizing,



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Are there more women in your field, the legal sciences, now than there were back when you were starting your career, or has this number stayed the same?

There are a lot more. Back in the mid-1970s, when I started working at the Faculty of Law of the Jagiellonian University, there were only four women on the Faculty Board. After that, their number started to grow steadily. First, female students of law outnumbered male students. After that, the number of women in PhD programs nearly reached that of men. Today, women account for nearly 30% of the members of the Faculty Board. But it's been 40 years. It needs to be stressed that law was traditionally seen as a "male" field where women started to take up research posts later and there were fewer of them than in philological faculties. Importantly, women are now increasingly likely to take over as heads of departments and institutes and as deans or deputy deans of the faculties of law.

How would you assess today's condition of science in Poland?

I would never make such an assessment! What could I possibly know about the condition of the geological sciences or astronomy? I don't trust the criteria used in various rankings that allegedly serve to measure and determine this. Most probably, it is possible to boost Poland's scientific position in the world, just as it is possible to increase the share of women in science, but we need time – that can't be a result of chaotic administrative decisions. Aside from that, maybe it would be better to invest in the development of specific disciplines, because we can't excel at everything. Above all, we should better appreciate the humanities. That won't bring a spectacular success in rankings or an overwhelming number of citations, but Polish science also means work in the humanities and partly social sciences. Research in other sciences will be inevitably dominated by international, multinational research teams, because the future belongs to such teams. I guess that's a good thing.

What could be done to make Polish science more competitive in relation to science in Western countries?

Why competitive? These are not the Olympic Games. It should reach the same level. What we need is obviously money and stability. Polish science is underfunded, and that has been clear for decades. It's also clear that a country that doesn't invest in science stands no chance in the modern world. Only if we spend decent amounts of money on science can we become full-fledged members of the research teams I mentioned a moment ago, as opposed to constant supplicants. By "stability," I mean fulfilling what probably every scientist wishes for: to have laws and regulations regarding science discussed thoroughly with



us, and for constant changes and amendments to such regulations to be stopped. Today, such consultations are often very brief or even superficial.

PAS Members are calling for a reform of the Academy. What would you change in this institution?

It would be somewhat presumptuous of me to have a ready concept of reforms to prescribe for an institution whose member I became just several months ago. I would be careful with reforms, because I take an interest in the history of academies of sciences in various European countries and I find the hierarchical model of education, which is based on the master-pupil relationship, to my liking, even if it is somewhat feudal in its nature. Science should have its elite, and that is the purpose of academies of sciences.

Do researchers in the legal sciences find useful sources of inspiration in other fields, even distant ones?

Of course. I believe that the field of law is particularly forced to seek such inspiration. That's because there's

think could be done to change this? Have you ever applied for such a grant?

Most probably, the situation is similar to the scientific advancement of women. We have to be bold, overcome our limitations, and take the initiative. In this case, we additionally need to get accustomed to certain formal requirements, because science is becoming increasingly bureaucratic. It's becoming more and more global, so this bureaucracy can't be avoided. I have never applied for an ERC grant; not every research project needs organization and funding on such a scale. The way I work is the same as centuries ago: I analyze documents dating back hundreds of years and try to draw conclusions that are new and innovative, although it might appear that everything there is to say on a certain subject has already been said. That gives me great satisfaction!

Are you currently working on any projects funded by a grant from a Polish institution?

Last year, I finished working on many projects funded from grants and led by my longtime superior, Prof. Michał Jaskólski. Several grants funded by the former Committee for Scientific Research (KBN), the Ministry, and then the National Science Center (NCN) resulted in the publication of the monumental six-volume *Słownik historii myśli politycznej* [Dictionary of the History of Political Thought], edited by Prof. Jaskólski and, in the last three volumes, by me. We were hoping for a grant from the National Program for the Development of Humanities, where we submitted a grant application for writing a similar dictionary, this time devoted to Polish political thought, because we can see that this field has been largely neglected – we don't know much about prominent Polish thinkers. But unfortunately we did not receive funding.

Russian legal and political doctrines are a large part of your research work. What made you take up an interest in that country?

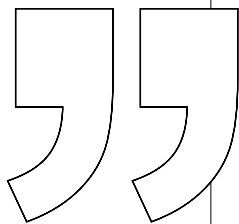
I was interested in Russian literature, especially its political aspects. More specifically, I could point the finger at the prominent actor Wojciech Pszoniak. I chose the subject of my master's thesis after watching his excellent performance in Dostoyevsky's *Demons* in the Stary Theater in Kraków, directed by Andrzej Wajda. I began to read about Dostoyevsky, about those who inspired his most political novel, and that turned into a lifelong passion. All this despite the fact that I had to retake an exam in Russian in high school, and there was nothing to indicate that I would fall in love so suddenly. But that's the power of art!

I find your publication *Rodowód literacki inteligencji rosyjskiej* [Literary Origins of the Russian Intelligentsia] from 1992 especially

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outer space law, and there's family law, etc. Law has a history that dates back thousands of years, it has its expressions in world literature, it can't function without psychology and sociology, and it refers to fundamental philosophical concepts. That's more than just inspiration. Studies in these and other fields are an integral part of law as a scientific discipline that is characterized by the successful development of such branches as the history of law, the philosophy of law, the sociology of law, and so on. But we can't restrict ourselves to the humanities: technology, medicine, and natural sciences associated with the law are part of everyday work for many members of the legal profession, so this must be reflected in the research conducted by lawyers. I myself specialize in the history of political and legal doctrines, which means a field that may not be immediately associated with the traditional branches of law, but it nonetheless enjoys a stable and well-earned position.

Polish scientists receive very few grants from the European Research Council (ERC). What do you



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interesting. Which of Russia's great authors is especially important to you?

I am also emotionally very attached to that small book. It is related to my doctoral dissertation, devoted to the concept of "the superfluous man" in the Russian literature of the first half of the 19th century, one of Russia's "lost generations," the prototype of the Russian intelligentsia. In that research, literature was not only the best but also the only source, and it was indeed very attractive. Of course, just like many things, possibly even everything, in Russian literature, it started with Pushkin and his *Eugene Onegin*. After that, there was Dostoyevsky, obviously followed by Gogol. But my favorite author was Turgenev, a true giant of Russian literature, now somewhat forgotten. A great artist, a political writer *par excellence*, and the only author who could recreate so well the ambience of the Russian provinces, "a nest of the gentry," the fair, friendly, and sentimental side of the Russian reality. After him, there were also Chekhov and Bunin, but I prefer Turgenev.

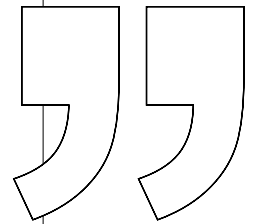
You devoted another of your books to the Byzantine princess Zoe Palaiologina, the Grand Princess of Moscow and the grandmother of the Tsar Ivan the Terrible. In what ways did she differ from other influential women of her era?

I devoted the whole of that book to proving that she was *not* one of the influential women of her era. She went down in history as a symbol, not as a true ruler. It was alleged that she was linked to the fact that after the fall of the Byzantine Empire, Moscow took over as the hegemon in the Orthodox world and a theory was later developed that saw it as a "Third Rome." In that way, a cliché emerged through which people made attempts to get to the bottom of Russia's distinctive character. But the thing is that science should not propagate clichés. However, we can study them. Indeed we should do so, not to mention the fact that this is a very interesting subject.

Clichés and similar mechanisms of thinking don't emerge randomly, they occur in response to the need to explain a certain element of the reality against which we are helpless – we can't get to the bottom of that element without creating a tool. More often than not, the West has such problems with Russia. After reading many documents from that era, I could argue that Zoe Palaiologina, a niece of the last Byzantine emperor, played no major political role as the Grand Princess of Moscow – she didn't cause the Byzantization of Russia, nor did she persuade her husband to regard Moscow as the "Third Rome." Meanwhile, what I found interesting was the era, the way the rulers in Moscow pursued politics, which was very unconventional and extremely effective. Of course, there was also Zoe. She was forced to show courage, overcome difficulties, and withstand humiliation that we would

now find unimaginable. An escape from Constantinople, threatened by the Turks; exile; adoption by the Pope; marriage plans that failed because the disinherited princess, who was not exactly young by the standards of that era, had no dowry; finally a marriage by proxy and a journey to a faraway barbarian country that had just gained independence from Mongol rule to marry a widower with adult children. Fortunately, the marriage was happy. But that was not the end of Zoe's story. Court intrigue, periods of disgrace, fights over succession to the throne, wars, and escapes were daily occurrences in Zoe's life. She gave birth to 10 children. When she went with her daughter, Helena, to the border to see her off, she knew she would never see her again. Such a situation surely captures our imagination. Helena was the wife of the King of Poland, Alexander Jagiellon. She was also the only Polish queen who was denied coronation, because she refused to give up her Orthodox faith. The Pope was prepared to agree to her coronation, but the Kraków priests objected. Despite political infighting, the marriage was very happy. I'm sorry I'm talking so much, but these issues are truly fascinating!

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What are the challenges facing the legal sciences in Poland in connection with the election win of the Law and Justice (PiS) party?

The legal sciences in Poland are in excellent condition. We have many prominent lawyers whose opinions are important and highly-valued in international bodies, institutions, and organizations of lawyers. As for the measures taken by the PiS, in particular numerous new acts of legislation adopted by the Sejm majority, I have the impression that the legal education of broad groups of society has been neglected, and I can see a challenge here for us, lawyers. Knowledge of the law is the only thing that will allow people to assess the quality of these acts and express their opinion about the authors and supporters of such laws in the future, during elections. Consequently, we have some grassroots work to do, especially as teaching young people the basics of law has not been traditionally included in the numerous reforms of the education system.

INTERVIEW BY ANNA KILIAN

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